Interviewee: Bruce Brummond
Interviewer: Thomas Saylor
Date of interview: 24 June 2004
Location: Brummond residence, Hutchinson, MN
Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, August 2004
Edited by: Thomas Saylor, October 2004

Bruce Brummond was born 7 September 1917 in Buffalo Lake, Minnesota, an only child, and grew up in Hutchinson, Minnesota. He graduated from Hutchinson High School in 1935. Bruce volunteered for the US Army and was inducted into service in April, 1942. He was married in 1942 (wife Betty).

Bruce served with E Company, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was taken prisoner on 20 December 1944, at Echternach, Luxembourg, during the German offensive that had started a week earlier. Bruce spent some weeks on the move, as well as short periods of time at several POW camps: Stalag XII-A Limburg; Stalag II-D Stargard; Stalag II-A Neubrandenburg. He was finally liberated in early May by advancing British forces from another camp, near Bremervörde in northwest Germany.

Bruce spent several months recovering from his ordeal as a POW, and was discharged from service in September 1945 with the rank of sergeant. Again a civilian, he returned to Hutchinson where he and Mary raised six children. Bruce worked many years in retail men's clothing, then in footwear sales for the Goodrich Company. He was interviewed at the family home in Hutchinson.

<u>Interview key</u>:
T = Thomas Saylor
B = Bruce Brummond
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Thursday, 24 June 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm speaking with Mr. Bruce Brummond of Hutchinson, Minnesota, and this interview is taking place at his home in Hutchinson. First, on the record, Mr. Brummond, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

B: Well, you're entirely welcome. I'm glad to.

T: Good. For the record I have the following information and please correct any mistakes. You were born in Buffalo Lake, Minnesota on 7 September 1917. An only child?

B: Yes.

T: And you grew up right here in Hutchinson. Graduated from Hutchinson High School 1935. You were a volunteer into the United States Army. Inducted into service April of 1942 and you served with the 4th Infantry Division. What regiment were you in, Mr. Brummond?

B: 12th Infantry Regiment.

T: And it was E company?

B: E Company.

T: On the other end of that, you were discharged in September of 1945. You were in Europe in late 1944, and it was in December of 1944 that you became a prisoner of war. And it's there that I'd like to pick up the story. I learned that you joined the 4th Infantry Division as a replacement in late October 1944.

B: That's right.

T: Now you'd been in the service by that time two and a half years? Close to two and a half years?

B: Yes.

T: What had you done up until that time, Mr. Brummond?

B: I started out with an ordnance regiment that was recruited by Burt Baston, who was the end coach at the University of Minnesota and was recruiting a regiment from this area. And of course they sold us on the idea that you could go in and you'd be with people you knew and be with your friends and so forth. When we first reported we were sent to Camp Chaffee, North Carolina. No, I beg your pardon—Camp Sutton, North Carolina. We were in training there. Had our Basic. A friend of mine decided he was going to go into Air Force, so I went with him and we both transferred to the Air Force for training. We went to the University of Pittsburgh for several weeks, where we had some college brush-up courses and we also had ten hours of flying. My friend was classified as a navigator, and I washed out as a pilot because of the depth perception of my eyes, and I was also classified as a navigator. I was in preflight. I was in Camp Rucker… I'm confused. I was at Camp Cochran, Georgia, and we were waiting to go out to preflight when General Hap Arnold came out with the order that the Air Force was filled and that all those who were not in preflight were to be sent to the ground forces. So I wound up with the 66th Infantry Division at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, and then later on at Camp Rucker, Alabama, and from there I was sent over to Europe as a replacement with the 4th Division.

T: Was that disappointing for you in a way, to see a career in the Air Corps kind of terminated and be shunted off to the infantry?

B: In a way it was because we had had ten hours of flying and we liked it. Let's face it. Then all of a sudden the rug was pulled out from under us. But what are you going to do? You take it like it comes.

T: By 1943 you were twenty-six years of age. How did your age compare to the men around you that you joined in the infantry there?

(1, A, 43)

B: I was at the upper end of it. A lot of them were younger than I.

T: Did you feel any sense of, did people look up to you rather, as kind of an older brother or a father type because of that age difference?

B: Not really. I think we were all more or less on an even plane.

T: And what were you trained as in the infantry? Were you a rifleman?

B: I was a rifleman. Yes.

T: So you knew you were going to be joining some kind of a rifle company in Europe eventually.

B: That's right.

T: Do you remember the trip across the ocean?

B: Yes.

T: You're smiling. What can you say about that?

B: I thought it was a very good trip. I met a friend. I shouldn't say a friend. It was a fellow that I hadn't known before but we became very friendly, and this fellow was a fellow by the name of Earl Baker. I still correspond with his daughter occasionally. Earl ran the PX on the ship and he said, "You were in the clothing business and" he said, "I was in the clothing business. I'm running this PX and I need some help." He said, "Why don't you help me instead of just sitting around all day?" I thought, gee, that's pretty good. So a couple hours every day I'd work in the PX with him. I didn't get seasick like so many of them. So many of them were just hanging over the rail. They were really, really in trouble. I enjoyed the trip. We got into Southampton. We docked at Southampton. We walked about two miles down the dock and there was the Red Cross girls and they gave us donuts and coffee and then we got another boat and went across the Channel and we went in at Le Havre.

T: As you got closer to the war, in a sense, did that become more real to you? Did you find yourself becoming, oh, I don't know, nervous, worried, scared?

B: Not really. I don't know why. You know, I was confident that I could handle anything that I came up against.

T: Is it about this time that you joined the 4th Infantry Division? When you actually were in France?

B: Yes. Yes.

T: Did you join that Division, that Regiment, 12th Infantry Regiment I think you said, E company, with anybody that you knew or were you, in a sense, in a whole new surrounding with no friendly faces?

B: I didn't know anybody. They were all new to me.

T: Did that make the adjustment difficult in any way?

B: It may have but I didn't realize it. They were all very friendly. The new kid on the block. They had to depend on him too. So it was to their advantage to get friendly and find out what he was all about.

T: Sure. In what ways did being a front line combat soldier differ from the way you had imagined it before you got there?

B: I think perhaps the biggest thing was they taught you the basics but a lot of that went out the window and you had to react to the situation as it came up. You did a lot of things that you didn't train to do but had to do at the time.

T: Do you recall the first time that you came under enemy fire, either small arms or artillery?

B: Yes. We were ready to go up to the line the first time and we were strafed by planes. We were on trucks and strafed and we *(chuckles)* all scrambled off and ducked for cover. That was my baptismal fire.

T: Describe what was going through your mind at that moment.

B: Trying to find a safe place. We had been living in dugouts and we all headed for the dugout.

(1, A, 88)

T: So the trucks were close to the dugouts.

B: The trucks were close and they were ready to haul us up.

T: Were there casualties from that particular strafing incident?

B: Not that I'm aware of. There was an artillery battery right next to us and they were really after the artillery battery more than they were us. They probably didn't even know we were there.

T: I see. I see. How long were you on front line positions before the date of your capture which was 20 December?

B: Oh, from early October when we went into the Hürtgen Forest until I was captured.

T: So the unit fought in the Hürtgen Forest until late December.

B: Right. Right. And then they pulled us down into Luxembourg.

T: Probably in conjunction with the German offensive which started, what, four days before that, I guess? As far as being a combat soldier, what was the most difficult about that for you? Think of October, November, early December.

B: Oh, I would say it would be getting used to the living conditions. You didn't know if you were going to eat or sleep. Getting used to living with fear and operating with fear. Everybody did.

T: How does one, how did you get used to that? Or how did you deal with the fact that fear was part of your everyday life?

B: Well, you just realize that's the way it's going to be and that's it. You can't change it. You want to survive. So you make the best of it.

T: On 16 December the German Offensive in that area began. How do you recall the beginning of that offensive? You were stationed in Luxembourg where you were captured.

B: We [six of us] were holed up in this house…

T: When the German Offensive began. So you were…

B: Yes. We were holed up in this house, and the artillery, the artillery barrage. We figured that was the signal they were coming. They did.

T: Bruce, I'd like to move to the time, the day you were captured, and that's 20 December 1944. Can you describe the circumstances surrounding your actual capture by the Germans?

B: Our company was set up on a block, and one group was in one house and another group was about two houses down. Our group was about two or three houses further down.

T: This is the town of Echternach [Luxembourg]. Is that right?

B: That is the town of Echternach. We looked out on the street and on one side of the street was a concrete wall about six or eight feet high, and they were shelling us. They would ring a bell in the schoolhouse and we'd hear the armor moving and they'd hit us from one direction. Then the bell would ring again and the armor would move again and they'd hit us again. Finally we realized that there was no way that we were going to get out. Our sergeant said, "You know what the alternative is going to be. We're going to surrender." So there was some a pair of women's white long johns laying on the floor, and I tossed it over to the sergeant. He hung it on a stick and stuck it out the door, and we went out.

T: What kind of discussions or conversations were there among you and the other men there about the situation? About what might happen?

B: I don't recall too much about talking about what might happen. We were talking that they had us, and that we couldn't get out. I remember I heard some of the Germans talking across the way on the other side of the wall.

(1, A, 145)

T: So they were that close to you.

B: They were that close. These houses were built right next to the—it was a street, but basically it was an alley in our terminology, and the wall was right next on the other side. I had a grenade in my hand. I pulled the pin. I was going to flip it over the wall, and about that time a shell from an eighty-eight gun went off right next to the door, and the concussion blew me across the room. I hung onto that grenade, and of course by the time I got to getting rid of it, why they were long gone. I just flipped it over the wall. Somebody said they threw a flamethrower down the alley. Whether they did or not I don't know.

T: How long were you and the other men holed up in this house or in this room before you were actually captured?

B: The battle [German Offensive] started on the sixteenth. We were in this one house and we took off when they started. We were overlooking a Novitiate and that was walled and they were coming over the wall, so we took off and we holed up in a hotel that night. Then the next day we went to that house, so that would be about three days before we were captured.

T: Three days. How many men were you captured together with?

B: Twenty-three of us.

T: Were you all in that house or in that room?

B: No. There were about six of us in that house.

T: At the time you surrendered, had you given much thought prior to that, Bruce, of what it would be like to be a prisoner of war?

B: No. I never even <u>thought</u> of being a prisoner. You think of being in combat. You think of being hit. But I never even gave it the slightest thought of being a prisoner of war.

T: So you had contemplated what it might be like to be wounded or even killed but not to be captured.

B: Well, I don't know how much actual thought I gave to it, but you think you could get hit. But as far as being captured, didn't even have the vaguest thought of it.

T: And once the white flag went out the window as you described, the white rag to indicate that you were going to be a prisoner, did you begin to think at that time what's going to happen to me?

B: Not really. All you thought about is getting out of there, and everything stopping. All of a sudden it got pretty quiet.

T: When you indicated with the waving of the white rag outside the window that you were going to surrender, describe what happened next, until you came into contact with the Germans? Were they right there to get you?

B: Oh, yes. They were right there, and they had the guns and said, "Raus! Raus! Raus!" Come on out! Come out! Come on out! And we went out. Then they asked us, do you have any wounded? And we had two.

T: In the room you were in?

B: In the room we were in. One of the boys got creased above the eye and one of the others got the brunt of a potato masher, which is a grenade, really, that the Germans used. I'm sure he had a broken leg, and I'm sure he had some internal injuries. So they brought in stretchers and went in and put them on the stretchers and hauled them out and they put them in an ambulance and the ambulance took off. That's the last I ever heard of them. Now they could have taken them to a hospital. They could have taken them out in the woods and shot them. Who knows?

T: So you're not sure…

B: I don't know.

T: …what happened to those guys.

B: No.

(1, A, 200)

T: Face to face with the Germans there. Describe what was going through your mind when suddenly you do have a German soldier this close to you.

B: You were a little apprehensive as what was going to happen, because we had heard about the massacre at Malmedy [Belgium].

T: Just a couple days ago.

B: That's right. Then also we were impressed with how arrogant they were. They were very arrogant. Of course probably not quite as arrogant as they had been earlier because a lot of them realized this was the last big push and they were on the downhill grade. But that really impressed me. How arrogant they were.

T: Would you describe your own feeling as one of apprehension or more fear?

B: Probably apprehension more than fear. I mean, you know, after you've been up on the line and been in combat, how much more is there?

T: Were you or anybody else frisked or questioned at the time you were captured?

B: Yes. We all took our watches and pushed them up on our arms. But as I recall they didn't take anybody's watch. But they did take money from me. I've forgotten how much, but I had some money and they wanted that. And before we went out, anything that we had in our wallets or on our person that would be derogatory to the Nazis, we got rid of.

T: So you knew enough to get rid of that stuff.

B: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: And what prompted you and the other men to get rid of stuff like that? How did you know to do that?

B: We just thought that it wouldn't be very prudent to get caught with it.

T: I see. Anything that you personally disposed of with that in mind?

B: Yes. I had picked up a picture on the floor of that house that showed a dog peeing on the picture of Hitler and I threw that away *(laughing)*.

T: That's probably not prudent. That's a good example. Were you questioned or interrogated at the point of capture there at all?

B: No. Nobody was. We were at Limburg.

T: Was that, XII-A Limburg, was that the first time you were questioned by any Germans?

B: Yes.

T: So from the twentieth to the twenty-fourth there was no questioning or interrogation of any kind.

B: No. They just marched us.

T: On the way to XII-A, was it all marching, or rail and march?

B: It was all marching until about four o'clock on the twenty-fourth, Christmas Eve. Then they put us on a train and we got into Limburg about seven o'clock that evening. So it was about three hours on the rail. Otherwise it was all marching.

T: What do you remember about that particular march of three or four days there heading towards Limburg?

(1, A, 248)

B: I remember we got hungrier and hungrier. I also remember we crossed the Rhine at Koblenz, and we were picking our way across this railroad trestle and there were big gaping holes in the trestle and the rails were all strewn around like a pile of jackstraws. We got about halfway across and some kid in the back of me yells, "Boy, wait until my girl hears I beat Patton across the Rhine!" *(laughs)*

T: So there was humor even in a situation like this.

B: Right. Of course we didn't know what we were getting into.

T: Sure.

B: We had a rude awakening later on.

T: Going through Koblenz, as a fairly large city, did you come into contact with civilians at all marching through there?

B: I'm sure we did, but I can't remember anything. It was out of order, out of the way.

T: You don't recall any kind of abuse by civilians.

B: No.

T: Directed towards you as prisoners marching through?

B: Not really. There probably was, but nothing that really sticks out in my mind.

T: The three or four days. What kind of food was supplied to you by the Germans marching?

B: I really can't remember. Probably a cube of bread. Maybe a little hunk of sausage. That was it.

T: You mentioned hunger already and was hunger something that you dealt with the whole time you were a POW?

B: Pretty much so. Eventually we got Red Cross parcels which helped supplement whatever they gave us. We had a lot of watery rutabaga soup. Maybe some turnips thrown in, and if you were lucky you might get a hunk of horsemeat. We had had

rutabagas at home, so I could eat them and it didn't bother me. Some of the guys that had never eaten a rutabaga thought it was terrible.

T: Sure. That takes some getting used to.

B: That's right. Yes.

Wife: He weighed less than one hundred pounds when he came home.

T: How much did you weigh when you were captured? Any way you can estimate?

B: I would say about 130.

T: So you lost twenty, thirty pounds.

B: Yes. It was tougher on the big guys than it was on the little guys, basically.

T: What do you mean by that?

B: Well, they had to have more energy to fuel their bodies and they lost more weight. Maybe some of them weren't in as good a shape as I was either.

T: You mentioned earlier you felt yourself in good shape at the time you were captured. Even though you were a number of years older than other fellow POWs.

B: Yes.

T: Limburg was the first camp you arrived at but you had a rail journey, the first of two rail journeys I guess that you had.

B: Yes.

T: As a POW. Only for a couple of hours the first time, you mentioned. When you arrived at Limburg there, actually prior to that, what do you recall about the train journey that took you the final distance to XII-A?

B: We were in passenger cars. As opposed to boxcars.

(1, A, 304)

T: And how many men, how many POWs, were traveling together at this point?

B: I really don't know.

T: Was it closer to 20 or 220?

B: I think it would be closer to 220.

T: So a number of groups. The small group with which you were captured was by this time part of a larger group.

B: Yes. You know, during the Battle of the Bulge. They got many, many people.

T: Yes. Tens of thousands were captured.

B: Yes.

T: Right. You were at Limburg at Stalag XII-A for less than a month, it looks like.

B: Yes.

T: That camp had a lot of prisoners in it. I'm wondering if you can describe, from your perspective, describe the conditions there. The barracks, for example, at XII-A Limburg. As you describe the barracks facilities at XII-A, we're looking at a picture. You can describe what's in the picture for me.

B: It's just like a big empty building. Of course it was swarming with men at the time, because they had captured so many people. You slept on the floor. I'm sure there were toilet facilities someplace in an outbuilding, but not in that same building.

T: How many men were in the barracks building that you were sleeping in? Can you estimate?

B: As I recall it was a large building. I don't know. There were many. Several hundred I would say.

T: In the building. In the barracks.

B: But it wasn't as cramped as some of the buildings that we were in later.

T: The number of weeks you were there at Limburg. You mentioned that was the place you were first questioned or interrogated.

B: Yes.

T: Can you describe the questioning that you had by the Germans there at XII-A Limburg?

B: We were of course trained to give only our name, rank and serial number. When this German started questioning me, as I recall he said, "Bruce Brummond, you were with E Company, 12th Infantry." In fact, they knew where we were and who we

were. One thing I remember about the German that interrogated me, he was immaculately dressed. He had brown, shiny boots and spoke very good English.

(1, A, 358)

T: Who was at the interrogation? The German, you, who else?

B: As I recall, he and I were alone in a room, and they took us one by one.

T: Now you're asked to give only your name, rank and serial number. What other things did he want to know from you?

B: He wanted to know where I lived in the United States, and a little bit about my family. What my father did and my mother worked or was a housewife. About some of my ancestors. If any had come from Germany.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 379.

T: So it sounds like the conversation was a little more than name, rank and serial number.

B: It was.

T: Did you feel compelled to tell more than name, rank and serial number? How did that conversation go, Bruce?

B: Not really. He was really, how shall I describe him? He was quite outgoing and…

T: Was he an intimidating figure for you?

B: Not too much. But in a way, yes. In a way, yes.

T: How so?

B: Because we were beat up from being captured, and here he was all immaculate. Immaculately dressed. Speaking very good English. Yes, we were intimidated in a way. I'm sure we were.

T: Did you feel or were you threatened or physically abused at all during the interrogation?

B: No.

T: So the questions were asked and if you answered them or not answered them you don't recall being threatened at all.

B: I don't recall being threatened at all.

T: Were you made to understand that XII-A was just a transit camp, or were you led to believe that you would be there for an extended period of time?

B: It seems to me like they told us that we would be going elsewhere.

T: And it was the case for you. Within three to four weeks you were moved out of XII-A.

B: Yes.

T: While you were there, you've described the sleeping quarters, the large kind of open barracks with straw on the floor. Was there a daily routine? Any kind of work detail there at XII-A for you?

B: Not that we were aware of. That I was aware of. There probably was but being that we were just transient, why we had nothing to do.

T: And yet there are hours that we spend awake. What did you do with your time there?

B: I can't really remember.

T: But you don't recall any specific work details where you were assigned certain tasks or anything.

B: No. I don't. But I remember Christmas Day. We arrived Christmas Eve and Christmas Day I started walking around the barracks, and in the air I heard a fellow talk about Dawson. I went up to him and I said, "Are you from Dawson, Minnesota?" He said, "Yes. I am." I said, "Do you know Rudy Froiland, who's a partner of mine in the clothing store in Hutchinson?" He said, "I sure do. I was best man at his sister's wedding." He was Edor Nelson, who was the baseball coach at Augsburg College. He was liberated before I was and he called Mary and he told her that he had seen me and that I was okay when he saw me *(chuckles)*. So it's kind of a coincidence.

(1, B, 413)

T: Yes. Sure. Even in a place like that you find somebody that you know.

B: That's right. Yes.

T: You were in a total of four facilities: XII-A Limburg, II-D at Stargard, II-A at Neubrandenburg –

B: Actually five.

T: Right. Add XII-A at Bremervorde, and then at Marlag-Milag at the very end. Of those camps, did you go with the same people? Were there people who were with you at all the camps or did you tend to move in and out of groups there?

B: No. We were more or less with the same group all the time.

T: Does that mean that you made friends or found acquaintances early and kind of kept with them?

B: Oh, yes.

T: Now you mentioned in your own diary entries people by the name of Ollie, Pete, Roach, and Soldo. Names I saw. Who were those people, Bruce?

B: They were other POWs, and Ollie and Pete were two fellows. Ollie, his name was Todd Olson. We called him Ollie. He was from Evanston. Pete was—I've forgotten his first name—Peterson from Minneapolis. And we just became friendly.

T: Did you know these guys before you were captured?

B: No.

T: So you met them. How did you become friends as POWs?

B: We were more or less thrown together with the same group and it just naturally evolved. Now Roach and who else was there?

T: Soldo.

B: Soldo? When we got the Red Cross parcels we'd get three or four of us and cook together. We'd take turns cooking. Take turns doing KP. They were two of the fellows that were in the group.

T: How important for you personally was having friends to share experiences or things with?

B: Oh, I think it was very important, because we would talk a lot about things at home and things we did before the war, things that we thought we were going to do after the war. Of course food was a big topic and we'd talk about recipes and things that our mothers made and our wives made. Those type of things.

T: So not having food sort of forced that onto your conversation time.

B: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: Did you have work details at any of the camps you were at, Bruce?

B: Not a work detail per se. I know one time they came through and they wanted some volunteers to help unload Red Cross parcels and I went with the group. I remember one parcel was broken open and there was a lump of sugar probably about so long and so wide.

T: Several inches long and an inch square.

B: We each took a bite and passed it on. You could just feel that course through your veins *(chuckles)*.

T: Really?

B: Yes. Because you were so hungry.

(1, B, 446)

T: Sure. Was hunger a constant at all the camps you were at?

B: Pretty much so. Because, well, they didn't have adequate food for themselves, let along giving it to us.

T: Yes. 1945 was hard for Germany. That's right.

B: So we were at the bottom of the list. I think basically the German people that I came in contact with, other than a few of the arrogant military, were pretty much like our people. You know, they're hard-working and honest and more or less friendly. But of course a lot of them lived in fear too. They couldn't do things they wanted to. Like I say, transportation was shot up. They couldn't move food around. So they had what they raised for themselves.

T: Is that something that you knew or understood at the time as well?

B: I'm sure we knew it but we didn't want to understand it *(chuckles)*.

T: The feeling in your stomach says something else.

B: That's right.

T: You mentioned the Germans a moment ago. Now think of all camps you were at—and it was five. In the space of four months or so. Is it possible to separate the people you came into contact with, civilians or military, as good Germans and bad Germans?

B: I don't think so. No. I'm sure if it were reversed, if we had captured Germans, we'd be just as arrogant with them as they were arrogant with us. I mean, after all, you know, you've got control. You do as I say or else. As a prisoner you have to remember who's got the gun.

T: Of the German camp personnel that you came into contact with or those on the marches or rail journeys as well, what kind of people were they from your perspective?

B: Well, the guards that marched us, I would say, were pretty much like our people. They were in the service and I think a lot of them didn't like it. Like a lot of us didn't like it, but what could you do? That was it. And of course, the difference was that we were on the winning side and they were on the losing side. So they were a little more, how should I say it, sour?

T: That's a good way to put it. The German guards, did you ever witness German guards being abusive of POWs either on marches or in any of the camps you were in?

B: Yes. When we were on the march some of the guys dropped. They couldn't go on.

T: This is from Stargard to Neubrandenburg?

B: From Stargard. And they were beaten with rifle butts. They couldn't get up. You knew they weren't going to get up. And what happened to them I don't know but you just kept going because you had all you could do to keep going yourself.

T: Were you ever physically abused by the Germans?

B: No. When we were first captured, when we came out of that house, I guess I didn't move quite fast enough. One of them kicked me in the rear end but other than that, no *(chuckles)*.

T: So you witnessed it but you didn't have anything happen to you personally.

B: Not personally.

T: Among the men. You mentioned having a group of friends. Did you observe other kind of groups of men as well? Was it a group?

B: Pretty much. Yes. I know there were three of us that were on the march from Stargard to Neubrandenburg. Myself. Gus Anderson was from Rome, New York. Chris Dippold was from Bellmore, New York. The three of us stuck pretty much together. We were walking of course, and at night our boots were wet. So what we'd do, they'd put us in big collective barns on farms during the night. We'd dig a hole in the hay and bury our boots. I had an extra pair of socks on me so I would put

the dry pair of socks on and the wet ones I put next to my body so by the next night they'd be dry and I'd change every day. The three of us would sleep together and we'd sleep spoon fashion. Three of us. The guy in the middle had a body on each side so he was warmest. We'd take turns sleeping in the middle.

(1, B, 502)

T: So you really did depend on each other for warmth and in a very immediate way.

B: Oh, yes. For everything. And for moral support. I remember we were marching one day and Gus says, "God! I don't know if I can keep going or not." I said "Oh, come on! Come on! Come on! Let's go." He kept going. Things like that.

T: Almost like a cheerleader for each other.

B: Yes. Yes. That's right.

T: That march was ten days by your own diary entries.

B: Yes.

T: Of the camps you were in and the couple marching or rail experiences, which of those was most difficult for you personally? Most difficult to deal with of the camp experiences or the rail or the marching?

B: I think probably the hunger and the cold. You didn't have adequate food, but you still had to carry on, and you didn't have adequate clothing for the winter weather. A lot of times when we were marching, it was sloppy weather. So you got wet feet.

T: Yes.

B: Fortunately I had a reasonably good pair of boots.

T: Were any of those five camp experiences more difficult than any of the other ones as you sort of compare them?

B: Probably the first two were, because you were getting used to being a prisoner of war. Afterwards you kind of got into a routine and…

T: Was there a routine that you kind of got into as a POW?

B: Well, I think so. I mean you knew you were going to be hungry. You knew you were going to be cold. You knew you couldn't do anything about it.

T: What I hear you describing is an adjustment process.

B: You more or less accepted it. You didn't like it, but you accepted it because [there] was no alternative.

T: Was that hard for you to come to terms with the fact that you were a prisoner of war?

B: Not especially I don't think.

T: You mentioned at XII-A Limburg and II-D at Stargard being kind of the adjustment process for you.

B: Yes.

T: So within a month did you kind of feel yourself, I hate to say comfortable as a prisoner of war, but comfortable in a sense? Knowing how it works?

B: Yes. I would say that.

T: As you observed other men around you, did others seem to have an easier or more difficult time coming to terms with being a POW?

B: Some of them probably had a tougher time because they were having physical problems. A lot of diarrhea. Some of those guys were so sick. There was no medication. The Germans didn't have anything to treat you with. When I was in Bremervorde I came down with yellow jaundice. They put me in what they called the *Revier*, the hospital. They gave me barley soup instead of the watery rutabaga soup.

(1, B, 540)

T: That was your treatment?

B: And they gave me some white pills, which somebody said were soda pills. I don't know what they were. Maybe they were just plain aspirin. I don't know. I was there a week and then they discharged me.

T: How was your health in general from December to late April?

B: Very good.

T: You mentioned the jaundice. Was that the sickest I guess that you were?

B: Yes. Yes. That's the sickest I was. And I really didn't know I had it until this one day, I think it was Gus Anderson, he said, "My God man, you're yellow! You better go to the *Revier*." So I went over there and whether I was lucky that it lasted just a week and has never recurred I don't know. In a week or ten days, whatever it says

there, I was out. Someplace here [in diary] I talk about I pulled off a toenail, so apparently I froze my feet.

T: Did you have trouble with diarrhea or dysentery yourself?

B: No. No. Not to speak of. I mean, everybody had a little because of the diet. Another place [in diary], I say at Bremervorde where I was out sawing wood that morning.

T: In April. Yes.

B: I don't know where the saws came from. We dug in. I don't know where the shovels came to dig the holes with, but they were there *(laughing)*.

T: Miraculous occurrence.

B: Yes.

T: Your health you would classify as decent or okay.

B: I would say yes.

T: Some problems but…

B: Yes.

T: Thinking about prisoners. You mentioned that you had a couple of close friends, that you helped each other and you observed others doing the same. What did you observe about the relationships between prisoners? You've got trying conditions. You've got not enough food. Were there conflicts between prisoners or tensions?

B: Oh, every once in a while a couple guys would have a problem and they might get up and swing at each other, but they were so weak that it didn't amount to anything. And it didn't last. There was tension between the Americans and the Russians. Americans got along with the British very well.

T: Where did you have Russians?

B: Well, every compound, every Stalag had their own compounds. They'd have American compound and the British sometimes were with the Americans. Sometimes they were separate. And the Russians were separate and the French were separate usually.

T: Did you come into contact with those other POW groups at all?

B: No. They were all separated by barbed wire fences but when we got Red Cross parcels you could trade back and forth.

T: At the wire so to speak.

B: At the wire. Yes. Maybe a guy might have a crust of bread and he'd say I'll give you two cigarettes for it and it's swell. Well, this one day, one of the fellows had some cigarettes and he went out to the wire, and this Russian had a little can that came in the Red Cross parcels. He said it was full of jelly. So I forgot what the guy traded for it. So they traded. Cigarettes for the can of jelly. Well, he got back to the barracks with it. There was about that much jelly on top *(holds fingers a half inch apart)* and the rest was all sand. He had been duped.

T: He had been duped.

(1, B, 588)

B: A lot of fellows traded their watches. I didn't trade my watch. I held onto it.

T: You held onto your watch? Do you still have that watch?

B: Someplace.

T: You mentioned cigarettes. Anyway, to conclude that thought, it sounds like this is a real flea market at the wire there with things going back and forth.

B: That was money. Yes, cigarettes were money.

T: Were you a smoker then?

B: I was.

T: So when you got cigarettes as a result of Red Cross parcels did you smoke them, or save them, or trade them?

B: I think I smoked most of mine.

T: But you observed them as a kind of currency to be traded back and forth.

B: Oh, yes. Or it didn't have to be cigarettes. You might have something else that came. That box.

T: A wooden box.

B: This one.

T: What we're looking at is a straw and wood box, six inches long, three, four inches wide, an inch or two deep. Handmade it looks like by someone.

B: Yes.

T: You got this from a Russian you say?

B: I got it from a Russian.

T: What did you trade for it?

B: I can't remember *(chuckles)*. I don't know why I still hang onto it.

T: Yes. You hang onto it and you have it out on view as well. And you kept that. Obviously that was one of the things that you kept with you through camps and repatriation and everything else.

B: That's right.

T: Was there much of a problem from your perspective at different camps of theft? In difficult situations people either stealing or being stolen from?

B: Not really, because there wasn't anything to steal.

T: There was food.

B: Well, there was food but… No. I don't really recall any problem that I'm aware of.

T: In the camps you were at, the five of them, how much news did you have of the outside world? For example how the war was going.

B: About all the news we got would be from new prisoners that would come into camp. They'd tell what had been happening.

T: Right. They were new sources of information when they came.

B: That's right. And of course any Army camp there's rumors galore, so you never know whether the rumor was true or not.

(1, B, 621)

T: Do you recall a lot of rumors making the rounds?

B: Oh, yes. Yes. We're going to be liberated in a week. We're going to be liberated and blah, blah, blah.

T: As an individual, did you recognize those as rumors, some of them, when you heard them?

B: Well, you didn't know if they were rumor or the truth, but basically you knew that most of them were rumors. You had to go by what you heard. I mean you could tell when the fighting was coming close to a compound, because you could hear it.

T: Did you remember anybody passing on news that they said was from a radio or anything like that?

B: No. I make a note here [diary] someplace where I say we were told that Franklin D. Roosevelt had died [he died on 12 April 1945]. It had been rumored at the camp before. But we didn't know it until it was officially announced.

T: I see. So there were rumors. There was news. There was the actual audible sound of the front coming closer at different camps.

B: Yes. Yes.

T: Was it, in a sense, as a prisoner, did you find yourself remaining fairly optimistic, Bruce, about the end of all this?

B: Yes. I don't recall any time when I thought that I would never get home. There may have been but I don't recall it. Because I always thought I'm coming home.

T: How did you keep yourself going on a daily basis when things were, let's face it, kind of crappy?

B: Well, you had other fellows to talk to. You'd talk with them and they'd cheer you up.

T: Did you do the same for others?

B: Why, sure. You had to.

T: So I hear you saying that friends were an important part of what kept you going on a daily basis.

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Very much so.

T: Did you, speaking of getting news, did you get any kind of letters or messages from your wife or any family or loved ones in the States?

B: No.

T: I wondered because you moved a lot.

B: Yes. So nothing ever caught up with me.

T: Did you send anything from any of the camps you were at?

B: I believe it was Limburg, but it could have been Stargard. I can't remember. I think it was Limburg. We were allowed to write one letter and two postcards. I wrote a letter to Mary. I sent a postcard to my mother and father and I sent a postcard to the store where I worked. So that would have been in December.

T: December or January.

B: Or January. And the letter never came through to Mary. The postcard to my folks never came through, but the postcard to the store where I worked came through on St. Patrick's Day, 17 March. That's why I remember it.

T: So you found out after the fact that one of those pieces of mail had got through.

B: That's right.

T: Now did the people of the store then communicate with your family or your wife?

(1, B, 673)

B: I'm sure they did, but the mail carrier who delivered it knew Mary and so he called her. He said, "Hey, a card came through from Bruce." Because I had been listed as missing. Missing in action. Then they knew for sure that I was a POW.

T: That must have been a weight off her mind.

B: Yes.

T: That's for sure. I want to ask about two specific things and the first of those is the rail journey you took from Limburg XII-A to II-D at Stargard, and that was five days long by your own diary entries. I'm wondering if you can talk about—it was a boxcar journey, right?

B: It was a boxcar. You stood. There was no room to sit down. You were jammed in there. It was cold. A lot of the fellows froze their hands, froze their feet. They had a bucket for sanitary facilities, and that was overflowing in a hurry and I don't know when it got emptied. Because of all the fellows in the boxcar, sitting in the boxcar, it formed frost on the inside. So you'd reach up to the top or the wall, if you could reach a wall, and scrape some of the frost off and wet your whistle so to speak.

T: Was food or water supplied during the five days you were in the boxcars?

B: They gave us some. A cube of bread and sausage I'm sure, before we left. I'm sure they must have supplied us with something before we got there. I really can't remember.

T: So you can't remember specific food.

B: It's kind of a haze.

T: Is the boxcar journey more of a haze for you than other parts of your POW experience?

B: Probably. I remember there was a crack in the boxcar and my friend, Gus Anderson, looked out one day, one time, and he said, we were going through a town and he said, "We're going through"—whatever the town was. I can't remember what it was.

T: Otherwise you couldn't really see outside.

B: No.

T: How would you explain why the rail journey is more difficult for you to remember parts of than specific camp experiences for example?

B: I really don't know. Unless it was just getting used to being a POW and kind of didn't register.

T: While you were in the boxcar did you get out at all? Once you were in were you in the entire time?

B: I'm sure we were in the entire time.

T: And was the train ever bombed or strafed by Allied planes?

B: Not that I know of.

T: How did you pass your time or keep yourself kind of straight in a situation like that boxcar, Bruce?

B: I can't remember. You talked a lot. We tried to sleep. Sleep standing up. You were a little apprehensive about what was going to happen. What we were going to get into.

T: Was that a time that you maybe felt more apprehensive than other times as a POW?

B: Probably so.

T: Do you recall any rumors or discussions on the train about, gee, where we're going or where we're being transported to?

(1, B, 741)

B: No rumors as to where we were going. There was a lot of wondering where we were going but no rumors as to where we were going.

T: And thus perhaps the apprehension. The other specific thing I wanted to ask you about was the ten day march you took from 29 January to 7 February 1945, and that's where you moved out of Stargard to II-A at Neubrandenburg. You're moving almost directly west on that march across the north of Germany there. During that march you mentioned food a couple times. Specifically what kind of accommodations did you have, if any, during the overnights? Where did you sleep?

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: Bruce, go ahead. You mentioned on the march here about the overnights. Where you were being kept.

B: The Germans had big collective farms, and they would put us in big barns in the haymows. We would sleep there; we slept in several barns. I remember one farm. They had a big steamer that they used to steam food for the cattle and the pigs, and they steamed a bunch of potatoes and we each got one potato. Less than baseball size. And that was our food for that night.

T: Was food in short supply while you were marching?

B: Yes.

T: More so than in camps even?

B: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

T: How many men can you estimate were marching from Stargard to Neubrandenburg? Was this a smaller individual group or was this a large contingent?

B: I would say one thousand men slept in a big barn on a collective farm tonight. So there must have been…I would say we started out with a thousand to twelve hundred men at that camp in Stargard.

T: Now did all those men march to the same place at II-A? Were you all kind of moved as a group?

B: Yes. Yes.

T: Did all the men make it?

B: No. I would say we lost probably two, three hundred on the way.

T: So over the course of ten days.

B: And on the way we came across a group of political prisoners that the SS troops were marching, and we had a picnic compared to what those poor people had.

T: What did you observe, Bruce? What did you see?

B: They were just like living corpses. They had the striped suits on and they were being beaten. It was terrible.

T: Was it possible to see yourself then as lucky in a sense?

B: Yes. They were tougher on their own than they were on us. That's what we said to ourselves at that time.

T: And yet you still lost a number of men along the way.

B: Yes.

T: Due to what specifically?

B: They couldn't go on. They were weak from hunger and cold and they just gave up. You know, you reach a point where you have to make up your mind where you're either going to go along or you're going to give up. And those that gave up, they didn't make it. Those that decided they were going to make it, most of them did.

(2, A, 29)

T: Did find yourself or feel yourself making a conscious decision like that? Of saying…

B: No. But in retrospect that's more or less what happened. It's up here [in your head]. I'm going to keep going. I'm going to make it.

T: Did the Germans make clear to you either through what they said or what they did what would happen to those who didn't keep up?

B: No.

T: Did you use your imagination to figure out what was happening to those men?

B: No. All I know is that when they dropped you could see some of them getting beaten with rifle butts but you knew they couldn't get up and what happened to them I have no idea.

T: Were there rumors that the Germans were taking them to a hospital or shooting them or is it something you didn't talk about as you were walking?

B: We didn't talk about it. No. We were too busy trying to keep going ourselves.

T: Among the five camp experiences you had and the rail journey and the march, as you see those different episodes in your POW experience, how does the march rank as far as on the difficulty scale as far as your own personal experience?

B: *(sighs)* Probably number two behind…

T: What was the worst?

B: The rail journey.

T: So the rail journey and the marching were, for you, worse than the camp.

B: One and two. Yes. Yes.

T: What made them more difficult than the difficult conditions that you described in some of the camps?

B: Because with those two things you were on the move constantly, where at the camp you were in one spot. You were with your friends. Well, we were with our friends the other way too. But you thought that you were going to be where you were for perhaps the duration. Although they kept us moving, but that's what your thoughts were. And you were a little more at peace with yourself than you were when you were on the move.

T: Were you a particularly religious person when you went overseas into service?

B: Not especially. I would say average.

T: So you went to church on Sunday as a kid or that kind of stuff? When you were a kid, for example, you went to church on Sunday or those kind of things.

B: Oh, quite often.

T: Did you find that you relied on faith or a belief in God as a POW for any kind of strength?

B: I'm sure I did. You know, everybody has a different way of expressing it. I'm sure we were aware that He was helping us.

T: Did you find yourself consciously praying or depending on your own faith any more than…

B: No. I probably said prayers most every night. I still do.

(2, A, 60)

T: Does that mean that you feel yourself as a more religious person or a person with deeper faith since you've returned from your POW experience?

B: Oh, I'm sure I have. Of course usually as people age why they have a more, a stronger faith too. Than they do when they're young kids.

T: You're still a young guy so…

B: Which is normal.

T: You were at Stargard for just a week it looks like at the end of January and at Neubrandenburg II-A for a couple of weeks in February after the march. The place you spent a long period of time comparatively for you, from 21 February to 14 April by your records, was at XII-A at Bremervorde. How was that camp different as far as the conditions you found than these other kind of pit stops you've made up until now?

B: For some reason it seemed to be more permanent.

T: As a frame of mind you mean?

B: Yes. Maybe we were just getting used to the routine of being a prisoner of war more so and could handle it better. We were getting Red Cross parcels with greater regularity which helped the food situation.

T: At Bremervorde.

B: Yes. Yes. If you could fill your stomach once in a while you could do a lot of other things too.

T: That was the longest period of time, seven weeks, that you spent in any facility.

B: Yes. Yes. Yes.

T: The conditions there. The barracks that you described and showed a picture of the barracks at XII-A as being really what looks like a large stall with straw on the floor. How were the conditions at Bremervorde as you remember?

B: There, as I remember, there were smaller rooms and there were probably around twenty of us in a room. Something like that. Can't remember if there was straw on the floor or not or if we slept on the bare floor.

T: There were not bunks as far as beds that you recall there?

B: I don't believe there were at Bremervorde that I recall. Some of the other places there were. This is kind of hazy too.

T: At Bremervorde. At this point you're still with a number of men that you've been with at these different stops along the way.

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

T: One thing you mentioned at different camps was a problem with lice. Did you pick up the lice early in your POW experience or was that something that only came later?

B: I don't know where we picked it up, but everybody had body lice. Head lice, especially in your hair.

T: What did that feel like to have those? Most people that are going to read this are not going to have lice experience.

B: Well, *(chuckles)* you're itchy, and of course the Germans did what they call delousing too. They'd have a pipe they'd stick up your pants leg and shoot some powder in there and down the back of your neck and the front of you. Whether that did any good or not, I don't know. But of course you couldn't get them out of your hair. Nobody had a comb. There wasn't any water to wash your hair in.

(2, A, 100)

T: From a personal perspective, what's it feel like to have lice on your body?

B: Well, once in a while you feel something crawling *(chuckles)*.

T: Really? You could feel them crawling across…

B: Once in a while.

T: More pronounced in the night or during the day?

B: More pronounced at night because you're quiet. During the day you're more or less active.

T: So this was something you had to…

B: You had to live with. There was no way of changing it.

T: Was that a serious thing from your perspective in the kind of issues you had to deal with or just something you had to put up with?

B: It was something you had to put up with. I'm sure if you caught a disease from it, it would be serious, but fortunately I didn't.

T: And that was at Bremervorde you had yellow jaundice?

B: Yes.

T: From your own recollection that was the most serious health problem that you had.

B: That's right. That's right.

T: Did the food change at all that you were provided with as far as what you had or how much you had from Limburg through the end?

B: Did it change?

T: Well, as far as how much you had or…

B: Yes. Because we started getting Red Cross parcels.

T: And do you remember getting more of those as time went on or with more frequency?

B: More. More frequency. More frequent as time went on.

T: So at Bremervorde and also at the last stop which was Tarmstedt you had Red Cross packages at both of those.

B: Yes. Yes.

T: How many men were splitting a package when you got one?

B: At times you would split it with four. At times with two. And at times you'd have one to yourself.

T: At least one occasion you remember getting at least one to yourself.

B: That's right. When we were at Bremervorde they would come in at the port of Lübeck.

T: Which is relatively close to there.

B: And they had to get a truck up there, or come in by rail. I told you about unloading it. That was at Bremervorde.

T: What was most useful for you in the Red Cross packages that you remember?

B: Probably the can of powdered milk and the can of Spam.

T: Why were those most useful for you?

B: Because the powdered milk you could use to mix with other things. You could cut up your Spam in little chunks and you could make kind of a watery sauce with the powdered milk. You know, things like that.

T: So you learned to be creative with the few things that you have.

B: That's right. Yes.

(2, A, 129)

T: Were you getting some food supplied by the Germans there at Bremervorde too? On a regular basis?

B: Yes. We got the rutabaga, turnip soup.

T: And was there bread there that you recall?

B: I'm sure there was but occasionally. That was the exception rather than the rule.

T: At this camp or any others how did you pass your daytime hours? You've got a lot of time to kill.

B: At that time spring was in the offing and of course the weather was warming up and we'd get outside. We'd sit down and we'd ask what's twelve times twelve? What's ten times twenty? Just things like that.

T: Really? Just sort of things to do to keep your mind active.

B: Yes. Yes. Then you might draw a makeshift checkerboard in the dirt and you'd use rocks for checkers. Things like that. Then you'd say, well, I guess I'm going to go

down to the post office and mail a letter. So you'd go out in the compound and you walk around a couple of times. You figure well, that's about as far as the post office is. Drop your letter in and you'd walk back. But keep the spark.

T: Keep your mind working.

B: Keep that working.

T: That's interesting.

B: That's right.

T: Were you consciously doing that do you think, Bruce? Keeping yourself kind of physically and mentally occupied?

B: I really don't know. I know we knew that we had to do something to break the monotony. Of course we did a lot of talking and we did a lot of visiting. Like I said before about things that we did before the war, things we were going to do after the war. Of course we swapped recipes and that kind of stuff *(chuckles)*. Which sounds kind of foolish now, but at that time it didn't.

T: There was conversation that kept your mind active and talked about different things.

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Oh, yes. Yes.

T: You said you talked about after the war. What did Bruce Brummond imagine for himself after the war at that point?

B: He was going to have a couple of clothing stores.

T: Is that right? You envisioned kind of a continuation of your career before you went in the service.

B: Yes. Of course that never happened.

T: But you thought about it.

B: I went back to work at my job that I had before, which was the local clothing store here. Then as the family grew I decided I had to have a bigger buck, so I decided to go on the road.

T: But at that point in 1945 you saw yourself going back to the same kind of work in some respect.

B: Oh, yes. Yes. In fact I think most of the guys did. If they were happy with what they were doing. Some branch of it.

T: How often did you find yourself thinking about your wife and you had two kids at that time, right? How often did you find yourself thinking about your wife and kids?

(2, A, 170)

B: Oh! Quite often. At least every day. I'm sure. But you didn't dwell on it because… But sure, you thought about them. You had to.

T: You mentioned you didn't dwell on it though. What do you mean by that?

B: Well, I mean you didn't think well, I wonder what they're doing now? I wonder what they're doing now? I wonder if they're going to do this? I wonder if they're going to do that? That would drive you up the wall if you did.

T: You recognized that too. That's interesting.

B: Oh, sure. Yes.

T: By the time you were at Bremervorde it was the end of February, into March and the beginning of April. Was there a sense for you and the other men there that the war was counting down to the end?

B: Yes, there was. We had heard rumors. One day a couple of [British] Spitfires came over and they wiggled their wings. In another words, let us know they knew we were there. Some of the guys got up on top of the barracks and painted a big white POW on them. Then the rumors started flying that we were going to be liberated by the British. The battles were getting closer and closer as the Germans pulled back.

T: And yet in the middle of April there you were moved from Bremervorde to your last camp, the Marlag-Milag camp at Tarmstedt.

B: Yes.

T: Was that an eventful move? You've moved a lot now, but was that kind of a… That was a one day move it looks like.

B: *(laughing)* No. That was all it was. Came in one night and said we were moving tomorrow. Grab your socks. We're on the way. They told us it was going to be just a short walk.

T: It's not far between those camps.

B: No.

T: But you're practiced at moving now. You've…

B: Oh, yes *(chuckles)*.

T: You've been in a number of camps.

B: You didn't have that much to move. You had a bedroll and you rolled it up. You had a rope and slung it over your shoulder and away you went.

T: So really this kind of moving from place to place you had become practiced at it I guess.

B: Well, I guess *(laughs)*.

T: Five places in four months is a lot of moving.

B: Yes.

T: Do you remember at the last place, at Tarmstedt there, actually getting the word or… Actually, did the German guards disappear before the British actually arrived or were they there when…

B: No. They were gone. The battle was near Bremervorde there and the Germans had set up a battery of rockets. We called them Screaming Meemies, and they were firing over the compound into the village for several miles on the other side. Then this one night or one morning, we were here and this was a big open field.

T: Open field in front of the compound.

B: In front of the compound, and the tanks came up and they were going toward this little town of Bremervorde up here and the infantry was coming back. We heard sounds from the battle. All day. Then about dusk, here comes the infantry. They were moving at double time. They were trotting and the tanks were coming covering their retreat. Then we had already dug holes because we knew it was getting pretty close. I remember I slept in the hole with Ole and Pete that night. I climbed out, oh, I don't know. it was four, five o'clock in the morning and went into the bathroom. Some of the guys said, "We're free men. They came in and took the guards out last night." So there were no guards left.

About daylight British tanks came in. They called us all together and said, "We'll get you out of here as soon as we can. It may not be until tomorrow," or something like that. This was probably the most emotional experience of my life. They called us down to the flagpole and they had an American flag and they pulled down this Nazi flag and they ran up the American flag and some of those guys, mean,

real tough guys, standing there tears running down their… I still crack up *(speaking with emotion)*.

(2, A, 233)

T: So from all the things you went through, it was that moment that signified that the POW experience was over for you…

B: Yes. That was the, like I say, the most emotional experience of my life.

T: Did that, in a sense, were you able to relax now or was this the signal that the whole moving and transportation and POW experience was at an end?

B: Pretty much so. Sure, when you saw the British boys you know, you knew you were in good hands. You knew that things had done a flip flop and you were on the other side now.

T: What did you find yourself thinking about then at that moment when suddenly it was essentially over? What was going through your mind, Bruce?

B: Getting out of there and getting home.

T: Really? So it was a matter of…

B: Yes.

T: Now this is over.

B: Yes. Let's get out of here and get home.

T: And yet you stayed at that camp a number of days before you were actually moved out, right?

B: Yes. A couple three days. I can't remember. Anyway the British sent in big lorries, like moving lorries, and hauled us out. They took us to Diepholtz, and the first thing they did—we got off the lorries—they ran us through a line and they gave us about that much hot buttered rum.

T: In a little, like a shot glass?

B: No. In a <u>drinking</u> glass. About that much hot buttered rum. And you drank that and, boy! You can feel that going down to the tips of your toes! That was a terrific drink!

T: On an empty stomach too, right?

B: Yes. Then they gave us food, and of course you had to be a little careful. Not eat too much because your stomach was not used to that.

T: Now did you know that? About not eating too much.

B: Oh, they kind of warned you a little. Said use a little common sense.

T: How much did you use? Common sense.

B: We had white bread. The first time we'd had it for months. They gave us real heavy blankets like the British Navy had. And they were lush blankets. I slept like a log! Then the next day they deloused us and they ran us through a line and they gave us a razor, comb and toilet articles. They gave us British uniforms. We had the hobnail boots and the British tam and the whole shebang.

(2, A, 277)

T: So here you were dressed in British clothes.

B: Yes. And then about a week or ten days later they turned us over to the Americans.

T: Where did they keep you? Was it a British Army compound or something where you stayed for those seven or ten days?

B: Yes. I think we were in tents if I remember correctly. If I remember correctly we were in tents.

T: How did you pass those days? In one way I can imagine someone being anxious as all get out to get on with the show…

B: Yes. Well, let me refer to my notes again. "Expected to leave here today but weather against us. Wrote to Mary Jo and the folks today. Groups are moving out but it's the next day. But I don't think we'll make it. Too many ahead of us. My stomach has been on the blink for a couple of days." There you are. See?

T: Yes.

B: "May 4. Rain. Laid around until four o'clock and got a C-47 to Brussels. Pop, Andy, Steve and I went out that night. Drank cognac and beer and relaxed." *(Chuckles)*

T: So you were feeling a little bit better already, weren't we, Mr. Brummond?

B: Yes. Yes.

T: To sort of move ahead several stages: did you take a ship or a plane back to the United States?

B: Ship. They sent us to Camp Lucky Strike.

T: The main central POW repatriation facility, in Le Havre.

B: Yes. Those that had to be flown back they flew back but those that could stand the sea journey got a ship.

T: When you got back to the States, how soon were you able to contact your wife Mary?

B: Oh, we got off the boat and I think that same night I called her. From New York.

T: From New York?

B: Yes. I'm sure it was the same night.

T: This was probably May still at this point or early June?

B: Yes. I don't know when we got back to the United States. "May 4, 5 we went to Namur, Belgium. Turned us over to the Yanks. We were sent to Camp Lucky Strike near the French Coast." From what I remember when we were at Lucky Strike they said, you can sign up for passes for Paris. We all signed up for passes for Paris. But before we got there they said we can board a ship for home so we got on the ship. Didn't get to Paris.

T: Did you see Mary and your kids first or your parents or did you see them all together? When you actually saw them face to face?

B: Mary and our daughter first.

T: Was that here in Minnesota or out East?

B: In Glencoe.

T: When you first saw Mary you had a lot to catch up on. How much was she curious to know about your POW experience? That's our focus.

B: Oh, she wanted to know quite a bit about it but, I don't know. I think we were so glad to be back together that we talked until about two a.m. and then, like Mary [wife] said earlier, I didn't talk much about it for many years.

(2, A, 336)

T: So from when you right got back it was something that she knew about but didn't know great detail about from your memory.

B: That's right. Yes.

T: Were your folks both still alive at that time?

B: Yes.

T: What did your folks, how curious were they to know about what it was like to be a POW?

B: Well, they lived here in Hutchinson. Mary was living at Glencoe with her folks. I told my folks a lot of things. Not any more than I told Mary. But they didn't really press me for details or anything like that. I guess they were just glad they had me home.

T: Now as a former combat soldier, were more questions asked of you by your folks or her folks about being a combat soldier than the whole POW thing?

B: I don't think so. No.

T: Was it for you equally difficult to talk about both parts of that? Being a combat soldier and being a POW? If people asked you questions.

B: Probably about the same I would say. I don't know. The way I felt, I was anxious to get home and get back to my work and forget about the whole deal.

T: Do you feel that's what you tried to do in the years that followed, Bruce?

B: I don't know if I tried to, but that's what happened really. I didn't really get into it until we joined the POWs again which was in 1980.

T: That's thirty-five years after you got back.

B: Yes.

T: You had six children. Five are still alive. As your kids were growing up, I mean kids ask questions. What did your kids ask you about your POW experience?

B: They really didn't ask too much.

T: Did they know?

B: Oh, yes. They knew. They knew that I was a POW. In fact one of our boys took these to high school one day…

T: Telegrams.

B: Yes. For some project he had.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.

T: With your children, was it more that they didn't ask or you didn't tell?

B: Probably a little of both. I'm sure if they had asked, I would have told.

T: Sometimes we give nonverbal cues about…that's enough or…

B: Yes.

T: Your coworkers. You worked in retail men's clothing for a while and then for BF Goodrich. Did your coworkers know that you had been a POW?

B: Those that I worked with at the store here of course did. When I was with BF Goodrich my boss did and maybe one or two of the salesmen I associated with did, but other than that I don't think any of them did.

T: Was being an ex-prisoner of war in those years for you something to be proud of, something to be ashamed of, or was it a value neutral thing?

B: It was just something you didn't talk about. More or less. I don't know if you were ashamed of it. I don't know why you should be. You bought a lot valuable time for them before you were captured.

T: Yes. When you heard or were with other men who were talking about wartime experiences is that a conversation you would have easily joined with your own military experience or were those conversations that you, if you heard them, weren't part of?

B: I don't know if I quite understand your question. I probably would have gravitated toward them.

T: And shared your own experiences.

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

T: So being a POW wasn't something that made you sort of move away from…

B: No. No. No.

T: Were you a member of a VFW or American Legion here in Hutchinson?

B: Yes. I am American Legion, Forty and Eight, DAV. I don't belong to the Vets.

T: You're also, since 1980 you said, American ex-POWs as well.

B: Yes.

T: So you were part of some veterans' organizations.

B: Oh, yes.

T: The next thing to ask about is when you got back to civilian life or even when you were back before you were discharged—to start there. How much did you have nightmares or dreams about your POW experience?

B: Quite often. I had flashbacks. Nightmares. Like Mary was talking about. Probably didn't realize it at the time as much as she did. Of course she does now.

T: And when you think of flashbacks or dreams, nightmares that you had, was it combat experience or POW experience that you had coming back for you?

B: Probably both. It varied.

T: Of the POW memories or nightmares, what images do you remember that you did dream about?

B: Being hungry. Being cold.

T: So real specific things that you had a feeling of hunger or a feeling of being cold.

B: Yes.

T: Any people or specific incidents that would recur?

B: No. Not really. Just the general experience. Being in a compound with a bunch of guys around.

T: And did those decrease over time?

B: Yes.

T: Did they cease over time or do they still, do you still have them?

B: Still occasionally. I'll wake up and know that I've had a dream about this or that.

(2, B, 420)

T: Is it something that has decreased over time—you mentioned as far as how often you have them.

B: Oh, yes. It's not any specific incident. But I mean, I'll remember I'm in the service. We're doing this. We're doing that.

T: Are there certain things that you know will trigger or are more likely to bring on dreams or nightmares? Like conversations like this for example?

B: Not really.

T: So you may or may not…

B: Not that I'm aware of.

T: So you may or may not dream about this tonight.

B: I doubt it.

T: When you got back at Camp Lucky Strike or back to the States now. You're in uniform again. Did the military ask you any questions? Kind of a debriefing about your POW experience?

B: Yes.

T: Where did that take place?

B: I had to go to Washington, D.C. and they interviewed me about one of the camps. Some guy.

T: So it was a specific thing they wanted to talk to you about.

B: Yes.

T: A specific camp.

B: Yes. Yes. And apparently they had had problems with or rumors or something about somebody that they thought was working for the enemy or…

T: An American that was perhaps…

B: Yes. Yes.

T: I see.

B: And so they had me go down to Washington for two days before I came home. They took us out to an installation. It was a big farmhouse out of Washington. They said, "Forget you were ever out here. Forget that it ever exists." And they quizzed me and then they sent me home.

T: Do you remember what camp it was they wanted to know about?

B: I believe it was Limburg. I may be wrong.

T: And it was an American or more than one that they wanted to know about.

B: Yes. Yes. Apparently some of the guys had complained that they thought he was getting favors from the Germans or something. I've even forgotten his name.

T: Do you remember, was it somebody you could remember at that time? An individual that could recall.

B: At the time I knew the name. But I haven't the slightest idea what it was now.

T: Right. But they kept you there a couple days. Asked you a specific set of questions.

B: Well, they took us into Washington one day and the next morning we went out and were interviewed. As I recall there were two or three of us. Then after we were through by noon maybe they turned us loose and we came home.

(2, B, 448)

T: What's interesting is that was a very specific incident or individual they wanted to know about.

B: Yes.

T: You're not talking about any kind of general POW debriefing about conditions or camps or anything else.

B: He was some sergeant and he was supposedly the go-between between the POWs and the Germans.

T: But no one ever asked you questions that you recall anywhere else about tell me about your POW experience. What was it like for you? Anything like that?

B: No. No.

T: So in a sense you were put back in American uniform and sent on your way.

B: That's right.

T: Did the Veterans Administration after you were out of the service, offer you any kind of help as far as counseling or help with POW related issues?

B: I'm sure they did, but I didn't take advantage of them.

T: Did you have much interaction with the Veterans Administration in those years after the war?

B: No.

T: So Bruce Brummond came back and kind of went about his business.

B: Went my own way. That's right.

T: Have you had contact with the VA or help from the VA since you joined the American ex-POWs in 1980?

B: Yes.

T: How has your relationship to the VA changed in the last twenty-some years?

B: I still don't use it very much. We're only two blocks away from my doctor and my hospital here. We've got good insurance. I went through the VA to get my disability rating which is one hundred percent.

T: And when did that happen, Bruce? Was that back in the '80s?

B: About three years ago.

T: Just recently.

B: Yes.

T: Did you have any percentage of disability up until that time?

B: No.

T: Nothing at all?

B: No.

T: So you really didn't have much to do with the VA.

B: No, I didn't.

T: Did you ever go, after the POW Protocol in the 1980s, go and talk to the VA about being an ex-POW?

B: No.

T: Is that something would you say you've just not got around to or you didn't want to do?

(2, B, 470)

B: I just figured there isn't any point in it. I feel good. I'm physically in good shape. What do I have to trot up there for? It's a one hundred mile round trip to St. Cloud. Same way to Minneapolis VA. We've got a good doctor right out here. Of course when they finally did put the pressure on me—Dick Carroll, do you know him?

T: Sure do.

B: Dick Carroll and Jim Tuorila.

T: Up [at the VA] in St. Cloud there.

B: Yes. And finally put the pressure on me and Mary to get me up there and I finally went. Well, I found out there was quite a bit wrong with me that I didn't realize *(laughs)*.

T: What did they identify for you when you finally went to them, Bruce?

B: Flashbacks. PS—what do you call it?

T: PTSD.

B: PTSD. Terrific calluses on my feet.

T: So physical stuff as well.

B: Yes.

T: The feet.

B: Yes.

T: And at that point you went from zero percent disability to one hundred.

B: To one hundred.

T: Overnight.

B: Just like that *(chuckles)*.

T: So it was worth your while in that respect.

B: Yes. Mary said, "Why didn't you go before? You should have gone years ago." I said, "Nobody ever mentioned one word about money. All they said was get that exam. Get that exam."

T: Are you glad you went now?

B: Yes.

T: And do you keep in contact with people like Jim Tuorila up there in St. Cloud?

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

T: It's interesting that we're having a fairly open conversation about your POW and post-POW experience…

B: Yes.

T: Is this something we could have, an interview or conversation we could have had in 1950?

B: Probably. I probably wouldn't have been quite as open.

T: Do you find it easier to sort of share more details now than you would have in the past?

B: Yes.

T: How would you explain that? Why is that the case do you think?

B: Before, I don't know. I guess I just didn't want to talk about it. Now I don't know of any reason why I shouldn't talk about it. And if we don't get the word out people won't know what has happened because we aren't getting any younger.

T: So in a sense I hear you saying that your age has sort of helped to…

B: Mellowed.

(2, B, 499)

T: Helped you see that if the memories aren't recorded now that in ten or twenty years we won't have this opportunity.

B: That's right. Yes.

T: That's the last specific question I had. Let me ask if there's anything that you want to add at this point to get on the record.

B: I remember that the day we left on the forced march from Stargard was Franklin Roosevelt's birthday. Why that sticks in my mind I don't know but it's just one of those little things.

T: It's a way of dating when things happened as well.

B: Yes. Also I remember—I make a note here. When we were first captured they marched us away. We went by some civilians who were digging gun emplacements and one of them could talk English and he said, "For you the war is over." Well, it was just beginning.

T: It was almost over for him too.

B: Yes.

T: On the record then, Mr. Brummond, I'll thank you very much.

B: I'm very glad that I was able to be here with you. Enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW